

**Amendments to the claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of claims:**

Claims 1-38 (canceled).

39. (previously presented) An isolated nucleic acid encoding a protein molecule shown in SEQ ID NO: 1.
40. (previously presented) An isolated nucleic acid molecule encoding a protein molecule, the function of which is to protect cells against degeneration and/or cell death, wherein the amino acid sequence of the protein molecule comprises the sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 or a functional variant thereof.
41. (previously presented) An isolated nucleic acid molecule of claim 39, wherein the nucleic acid molecule is a DNA molecule.
42. (previously presented) An isolated nucleic acid molecule of claim 41, wherein the nucleic acid molecule is a cDNA molecule comprising a nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.
43. (currently amended) An isolated DNA molecule capable of hybridizing with the complement of the cDNA described in SEQ ID NO: 2 ~~under stringent condition~~.
44. (previously presented) An isolated DNA molecule of claim 43 encoding a protein molecule, the function of which is to protect cells against degeneration and/or cell death.

45. (previously presented) An isolated nucleic acid molecule of claim 40 encoding a protein molecule, the function of which is to protect cells of the nerve system, muscular system, prostate, stomach, testis, ovary, adrenal glands, mammary glands, liver, spleen, lung, trachea or placenta against degeneration and/or cell death.
46. (previously presented) A vector comprising a nucleic acid molecule according to claim 39.
47. (previously presented) A vector according to claim 46 wherein said vector is a plasmid, a virus or a bacteriophage.
48. (currently amended) A plasmid vector according to claim 47 wherein said vector is a plasmid is adapted for expression of said nucleic acid molecule.
49. (currently amended) A plasmid vector according to claim 47 wherein said vector is a plasmid is adapted for expression in a bacterial cell and further comprises the regulatory elements necessary for expression of said nucleic acid molecule.
50. (currently amended) A plasmid vector according to claim 46 47 wherein said vector is a plasmid is adapted for expression in a mammalian cell and further comprises the regulatory elements necessary for expression of said nucleic acid molecule.
51. (previously presented) A cell transformed with a nucleic acid molecule according to claim 39, wherein said cell is in particular a bacterial cell, a yeast cell, a mammalian cell, or an insect cell.
52. (previously presented) An isolated protein molecule shown in SEQ ID NO: 1.

53. (previously presented) An isolated protein molecule, the function of which is to protect cells against degeneration and/or cell death, wherein the amino acid sequence of the protein molecule comprises the sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 or a functional variant thereof.
54. (previously presented) A protein molecule of claim 52, the function of which is to protect cells of the nerve system, muscular system, prostate, stomach, testis, ovary, adrenal glands, mammary glands, liver, spleen, against degeneration and/or cell death.